

The Man In Charge Of Keeping Golf "On Its Toes"

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Interview with Ross Tanner of PGA Tour Partners Club

The business of golf is multi-faceted and many aspects of the game are as important as covering the 18th hole at Augusta on Sunday in April, yet sometimes remain overlooked. Did you ever wonder what the pros really do to maintain their focus on tour with all the distractions? What is it like being a new father playing professional golf every week? How do pros feel about each other...day-in, day-out? What are the most important things to remember when you are three strokes down—with three to play? What does the average golfer think of the latest rescue club, putter, or GPS system? Do these products really perform as advertised? How can you meet others around the country who share your golf handicap-cap, ideals and business goals? Those are some of the types of questions answered in every issue and included with one's membership in the largest group of golf enthusiasts in the world...the PGA Tour Partners Club.

I have been a PGA Tour Partners Club lifetime member since 2005, and was a yearly subscriber prior to that. *The Lifetime Welcome-kit alone is worth the price!* My business partner and I have also had the good fortune to have a product reviewed in the PGA Tour Partners Club Magazine, Member Tested section. This has had a tremendous effect on our business and has helped us to learn how we can improve, and better serve our customers. It is also a great service that the 500,000 (plus) Partners Club members provide important feedback on new products introduced by us, on the *business end* of golf. Everything from balls, accessories, clubs, electronic gear and even golf apparel is put through the paces and the report becomes published for all members to see.

This feedback is essential for golf businesses seeking to stay ahead of curve & keep their collective "finger on the pulse". Every golf magazine reports on Tiger and Phil; you get professional golf news on all the PGA players in PGA Tour Partners Club Magazine as well. However, there is much more that relates to you and I to be found in PGA Tour Partners Club Magazine...and nowhere else!

I recently had the chance to ask a few questions to the person who is perhaps most responsible for guiding companies like Gotta-Grip through the process of testing new products via the golfing public. Equally important, he's responsible for supplying valuable user feedback to manufacturers and golfers alike—Meet Ross Tanner, Product Test Editor, PGA Tour Partners.

Q. How did you come to work at PGA Tour Partners and what was your first job there?

Ross: I started working in the Member Services Dept. in 2001 taking inbound calls from our members. Over the course of three years, I received various promotions and have been the Product Test Editor for *PGA TOUR Partners* for over two years.

Q. How did the Members Test get started at the magazine?

Ross: The Product Test Program was started to create a highly sought after benefit for our members to become involved and feel that they were truly part of the Partners Club. It is a great opportunity for all of our members to see first hand what other members have said regarding 11-15 products per issue.

Q. How do you go about finding new products to test?

Ross: I attend golf trade shows, surf the web, subscribe to various press release newsletters, keep in contact with multiple PR companies, work with our advertising department and most importantly, I build friendships and working relationships with everyone that is interested in testing their products.

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Q. Are there any all-time favorite success, or unusual stories from the equipment tests?

Ross: Almost all of the clubs [drivers, hybrids, putters, wedges and sets of irons] receive a 100% approval rating. When I set up club tests, I am fully anticipating a 100% approval rating. My all-time surprise was a test we did with the Champ Scorpion Stinger Spikes. Out of the 400 testers, only two people did not approve the spikes!! I still remember the comments of those two individuals - both of them felt that the spike were too hard when walking on concrete/asphalt surfaces. They had no complaints about how well they performed on the course. To this day, I will only wear Champ Scorpion Stinger spikes.

Q. Do you get to test new equipment yourself, if so, were there any surprises you can recall?

Ross: I get to demo a few products that are tested. I play to a 17 handicap, so my swing is far from repeatable to truly give any in-depth analysis on any clubs, training aids or accessories. In all honesty, my job title sounds pretty glamorous, but I work in the same sized cube [if not smaller] than every other John Smith.

Q. How do you view your role in the testing process?

Ross: I am simply the facilitator of every product test. We test between 70-80 products a year and I see that each test is done in an efficient and effective manner. The best part of the Product Test Program is that both the manufacturers and fellow Club members are receiving unbiased opinions. This allows each product to speak for itself.

Q. What are some things that every manufacturer should keep in mind when developing new equipment or products?

Ross: Know **what** your target market of consumers is and stick with it. Each golf club, golf ball, training aid, etc. is designed for a specific group of skilled golfer. Outside of the wooden golf tee, I don't know of any product that can benefit and be used properly by EVERY golfer.

Q. I would be curious to know what your first impression of our Gotta-Grip product was...and the ultimate rating we received.

Ross: Educating golfers is the hardest part of any employee of a golfing magazine. When it comes to grips, golfers should really re-grip their clubs every 30-40 rounds of golf. The grip is the only contact point you have with the club and if they are too small or too slick you simply will not get the best results from your clubs.

My first impression of the Gotta-Grip is that it makes complete sense. It is easy to use and quickly restores the tacky feeling of new grips in seconds. A large majority of golfers do not re-grip their clubs every 30-40 rounds of golf and the Gotta-Grip is a perfect product for them.

Gotta-Grip received a 90% approval rating and an 8.2 overall member rating. For a golf accessory to receive a 90% or higher approval rating is simply fantastic. I would equate a 90% approval rating for a golf accessory to be equal to a 100% approval rating for a golf club.

We, at Gotta-Grip LLLP want to thank Ross Tanner and PGA Tour Partners Club for allowing us to be part of their Member Test program and we look forward to working with them in the future...And thanks again to Ross for "keeping us all on our toes!"

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